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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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SUBJECT Interview with Bina Kiyonaga

MAURY POVICH: Please welcome Bina Kiyonaga. Marvelous name. See that, woman looks American, is American, a lovely name like Bina, and married a Japanese-American, fought very hard in World War II and became a fine agent in the CIA, died in 1977 because of cancer. And Bina has written an article in the latest Washingtonian called "Remembrances of a CIA Wife."

Started out to be something that we don't hear much about. I mean how does a wife think about what her husband is dong, how much she can talk about it. Have your -- were your lips sealed for so many years?

BINA KIYONAGA: Well, what is the question? I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.

POVICH: Were your lips sealed for many years?

KIYONAGA: Oh, yes. Of course, you don't talk about what went on in the Agency. I was happy to be able to mention that my husband was in fact with the Agency, because we lived through a period when the Agency took a lot of flak.

POVICH: It sure did.

KIYONAGA: And here was Joe, and we [unintelligible] and we were -- ostensibly, we were with the State Department.

POVICH: You had kind of, not instructions, but there was a way for you to act in social gatherings, for instance.

KIYONAGA: Of course. Yes.

POVICH: What were some of the criteria in terms of how to act during a social gathering?

KIYONAGA: Well, first of all, remember I was -- I am a daughter of a Foreign Service officer. All right? My late husband was a Foreign Service cover. So I grew up with that.

POVICH: That means that he was -- the cover was that he was in the Foreign Service.

KIYONAGA: Yes.

POVICH: But a member of the CIA.

KIYONAGA: Yes, that's right.

So I grew up, my life was one big party. So diplomatic life for me was not difficult. But the fact that I was the wife of a chief of station of the CIA at the same time as I was a diplomat's wife, it all melded very nicely. Because Joe would tell me before a party particular people that he wanted to zero in on.

POVICH: And you would do your own undercover work.

KIYONAGA: Of course.

POVICH: For him.

KIYONAGA: Well, for Joe, for my country, I'd do anything. It was for my country, believe me.

POVICH: So you would talk to people who your husband might want information from, find out information from.

KIYONAGA: Well, actually, I never got any information, except for the few things I mentioned in my article. I can't take much credit.

I became friendly with people that Joe wanted to get to know, the wives of some of the key people in the government.

POVICH: You have children.

KIYONAGA: I have five lovely children.

Good morning, children. How are you?

POVICH: They all grew up, and at a certain point in time all of them were told who their father really worked for.

KIYONAGA: Exactly.

POVICH: How old was that? At what age?

KIYONAGA: Well, you have to determine a responsible age. In Joe's case, the age got younger and younger as we got more tired.

POVICH: Well, how old was your first, for instance?

KIYONAGA: Fifteen.

POVICH: Fifteen.

KIYONAGA: And he waited too long. She heard it from somebody else.

And the second one...

POVICH: And that hurt. That hurt the family.

KIYONAGA: Well, especially since we were entertaining a group of Agency people living in Washington, and she burst into the room and said, "Mike tells me you're with CIA." So that was a little embarrassing.

So Joe lowered the age then. David, of course, was very pleased, but disappointed, because he'd been going around for years telling people his father was a secret agent. So that had to go.

Ann was worse. She'd never heard of CIA.

Paul was by then -- he was 12.

I forgot John. He was pleased.

POVICH: He was pleased.

KIYONAGA: Yeah.

POVICH: So there was even interaction there in the family as to who was and who was not pleased.

KIYONAGA: But what's interesting is that we all became part of a big conspiracy and we couldn't talk about it, we couldn't discuss it. And later on, as the children grew older, they couldn't defend it. That's what tough.

POVICH: Well, what about those tough days, for instance, in the '70s that the CIA went through in terms of the break-ins and the tie-ins with Watergate? How was that upon the family?

KIYONAGA: Well, actually, CIA is so compartmentalized that one division -- Joe's covert makes up about five percent of the Agency. I don't know how it is now. But they don't know what's going on in other parts of the agency.

What I'd like to bring out -- and this is diverging --is that I wrote this article because there are a lot of unsung heroes out there. Men don't, or women, don't go into this work for public acclaim or recognition. Of necessity, the work --successful exploits go unreported; whereas mistakes find their way into the New York Times and Village Voice. And I just wanted to write this for them because they do marvelous things and get no public recognition. And I wrote it, as well, for my late husband.

POVICH: Why did he initially go into the CIA?

KIYONAGA: Well, he considered it an extension of his World War II military service, the defense of his country. And it ties in with these gentlement who were here. The realization that communism was a world threat. And he wanted to...

POVICH: And this was a way he could defend his country.

KIYONAGA: Yes. He wanted to be part of the team that opposed it.

POVICH: You have had some rather unfortunate negative reaction from the Agency. The head of the Agency, William Casey, was quoted in the New York Post as being furious with your article. You have anything to say about that? Because it negates everything you wanted to do, which was give a feeling that these people were very hard-working and very loyal and very dedicated and great Americans who were defending the country in their own way.

KIYONAGA: First of all, let's consider the source, the New York Post. All right?

Secondly, I have no indication that in fact Mr. Casey said that. I don't know the gentleman. I have not heard from him, nor have I heard from anyone presently with the Agency.

And so the whole point of the enterprise, a human interest story trying to humanize CIA, was lost. I don't think they even read the article. I wonder.

POVICH: Do you feel that what -- your good intentions were lost because of what's happened since?

KIYONAGA: Oh, no, no. I've received lots of good -- I

know how I feel. I know that I did the right thing. I didn't hurt a soul, no agents in place, no ongoing operations. It's all ancient history, a matter of public record. I just made it readable.

POVICH: Do you think we can think of the CIA as a little more human, in terms of its qualities?

KIYONAGA: They've always been human.

POVICH: [Laughter] They have?

KIYONAGA: Real human.

POVICH: Is that right?

Your husband, for many years, was stationed in South America and Central America, El Salvador. Life is not too easy these days for American officials down there. Was it easier in the '60s and '70s, or not?

KIYONAGA: Yes, it was easier. We didn't have the terrorist attacks that you have now. But there a lot of people who disappeared without any word.

POVICH: Was your husband ever in fear of his life?

KIYONAGA: Well, there were occasions when he'd take trips and be gone for days. Say, a helicopter would pick him up outside our door, presidential helicopter. Off he'd go. He'd come back in three days. Well, you know, you wonder.

I don't think he was ever in fear. But I do know that our lives, the lives of myself and our children, were threatened on a few occasions. Yes.

POVICH: You were going to write a book and it was talked about in the last few years, and you gave it to a friend of yours in the CIA, and, unfortunately, that was leaked to the Agency.

KIYONAGA: Well, I'd really rather not discuss it. I don't hold the Agency responsible for that. It was just...

POVICH: Are you going to publish the book, or not?

KIYONAGA: I haven't decided.

POVICH: Okay. All right.

Bina, thank you so much.

Bina Kiyonaga is -- now you work with the Columbia catering people. You have been there about a year, public relations director.

KIYONAGA: Yes.

POVICH: And good luck to you.

KIYONAGA: Well, thank you.

POVICH: And all of us in Washington can read the article.